

Every Car has its Own Story or Special Memory



In January 1989, after 8 years as head of the flight safety equipment and upholstery department in an aviation company, I decided to start my own upholstery shop, specializing in Ferraris. With the help of Matteo Torre at the Ferrari factory I made contact with Leonardo Fioravanti head of design and later CEO of Pininfarina who had overseen the design of many Ferraris. Over the years I also got in contact with many generous, helpful Ferrari people who were at the factory when the classic cars were built.

Many Ferraris found their way to my shop called "HVL Exclusive Italian Interiors". While some jobs will be forgotten, the special experiences of some cars and people will stay always as a memory in my mind.

In 1999 a car with a rare funny story arrived in our workshop. It was somewhere in August that year when the door of my workshop was opened by a friendly, smiling man. He told me that I was the man he was looking for to do the interior of his 250 GTE. He told me that good things had been said about our company in the Ferrari Owner's Club and that he had been sent by a restoration company from our neighborhood with whom I had already been working for many years.

The owner told me he had a special request. He wanted to do the entire interior but to reuse the old leather which was in his car. He showed me the interior of his car and it was clear that the foam had completely disappeared and been transformed into dust. The leather showed many cracks, it was dry and stiff but the owner explained his wishes and wanted to do the upholstery by re-using the old leather. I explained to the owner that it would be a challenge to remove the covers from the seats and door panels without damaging the old leather but promised him to do my best to reuse the existing old leather.

We stepped inside our workshop again and the owner took a seat behind the reception desk in our small workshop. We talked more about his request and I told him about taking quite big risks. I explained that it is almost impossible to stitch through the same stitch holes and how easy it is to break the old leather. I also explained to him about necessarily reinforcing the old stitching to prevent tearing of the old leather and that it couldn't be guaranteed that the old stitches wouldn't tear.

I told the owner about the labor hours it would take to remake the whole interior in the way he wished.

He seemed to be convinced about my skills and asked for an estimated price. I was able to calculate an estimated price because of my experience of working on those cars. I wrote the price on a HVL estimate sheet and showed it to the owner. At the same moment the telephone rang and I asked the owner if he would permit me to take the call, which he agreed to.

I stepped away of my desk and took the phone which was next to my work table. I answered the short phone call and turned back to my desk but the owner seemed to be gone. It was strange because I had not heard the door open. I went to the desk and looked behind it and saw the man hiding there. He told me with a



Words and Pictures by Henk van Lith

big smile on his face that he was so shocked at the price that he had fallen off the chair. I explained to him that this would be the approximate price because of all the work he asked for on his car. He told me that he would like to visit and look at other places as well which I fully understood.

I was visiting a colleague upholsterer who ordered our products regularly one month later and looked in his workshop where I recognized the 250 GTE of the owner who had visited me earlier. I told the upholsterer that he had a heavy job to do on the car but that I was glad for the owner that he had found an upholsterer to do this time-consuming job for a reasonable price.

It was about three months later that the friendly owner of the same Ferrari 250 GTE opened the door of our workshop and asked me to look at his car again. I thought he would be proud to show me the result of the job done for a reasonable price. But the owner looked quite nervous and seemed to be a little upset. I was shocked when looking at the inside of the car because the interior was not what I expected that it would be. The tubes of the seats were not filled with foam as the owner requested and the leather edges of the door panels were completely broken, the carpet was made in synthetic material and other items were still not re-upholstered at all. The headlining had many wrinkles and the owner told me that the upholsterer advised him to put the car in the sun where the wrinkles would probably disappear. I didn't understand the situation and asked the owner what had happened. He explained that there had been a miscommunication with the other upholsterer about of what he had in mind for the final results.

It seemed to me that the owner would ask me to solve the damage made by someone else. I did understand the situation but had to explain to him that much of the old leather was damaged now and that I had to make a new calculation to fix the interior and make it old looking while using new leather hides for a huge part of the interior. A new calculation was made and I asked him to sit on the floor so that he didn't fall off the chair this time and he started to smile. The owner told me that he knew about the good name which our company had and the price which we needed to realize to achieve the quality work while using the exact materials. He agreed that it was his own mistake and regretted not listening to me the first time.

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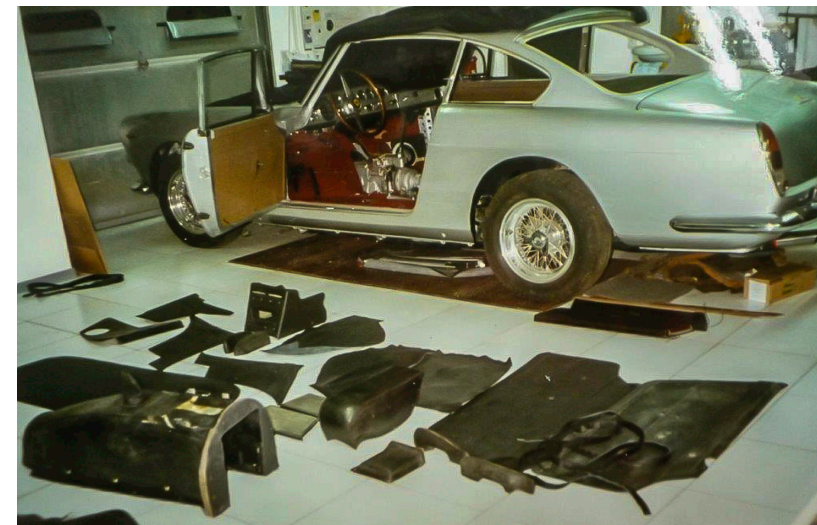
Top left: the GTE readied for re-trimming

Left middle and bottom: the old seat leather carefully removed

Top right: Henk hard at work in his workshop

Right middle: the remainder of the trim removed

Right: new headliner smoothly installed



Every Car has its Own Story or Special Memory - Continued



Top: completed front seat goes back into the car

Above: water resistant paper glued under rear shelf and HVL Certificate

Below: newly finished GTE at its first car show



We came to an agreement and picked a date to get the 250 GTE into my workshop to start work. I made a beautiful classic looking interior for it but had to use 2 extra brand-new leather hides which we made in the old style to replace the upholstery parts which had been destroyed. The seats were taken apart and seat leather was removed as well to glue an extra very thin fabric layer on the back side in places where the stitches were before. The tubes in the seats were filled with a thin foam and all the parts were sewn together. The old re-used leather and the new leather parts got the old classic look back again by using a specially made classic paint. To avoid a plastic look, I sprayed an extra very thin layer over the old and new leather in a way that the texture and pores were still visible. Water resistant paper was glued behind the door panels and under the rear window shelf like the original and the headlining and carpet were renewed.

In the end the car had its beautiful classic looks back again. After I was satisfied with the results, the parts were placed back in the car and the owner was called to pick it up. It is always a pleasure and it makes me proud to see the owner's reaction when picking up a car. This was especially so in this case where the owner had had a different experience before. Passion should show itself in the results of work and it gives a good feeling. The HVL certificate is handed over as a proof of original historic craftsmanship and use of exact official detailed historic leather and other upholstery products. The proud owner showed his car at his first car show and not long after that the car was sold for big money which made everyone very satisfied.